

## OBITUARIES

# Visionary engineer

**Dr Peter Hopwood**

Engineer

**Born:** Sydney, 1946

**Died:** Perth, aged 75

The role of engineers is to complement brainpower with expert use of materials such as machinery, engines and pipelines. A few members of the profession, such as Peter Hopwood, are hailed as visionaries.

In 1995, when he joined the board of WA's Water Authority — about to be rebranded as the Water Corporation — members welcomed a man whose intellect encompassed more than current devices and systems.

Declining rainfall in Perth and much of WA's south was making more and more scientists and engineers look to the sea.

Dr Jim Gill, retired chief executive of the corporation, recalls: "Peter's expert independent viewpoint was indispensable in giving confidence to the board and to the State Government as to the legitimacy of desalination as the way forward for WA. Without desalination plants, Perth would have suffered frequent total watering bans since 2001."

Dr Gill was not surprised to see how well Hopwood had turned out. In the 1960s the two engineering students had become firm friends while residing at the University of WA's St George's College. "Peter was very intelligent, generous and popular, with a wonderful sense of humour," he adds.

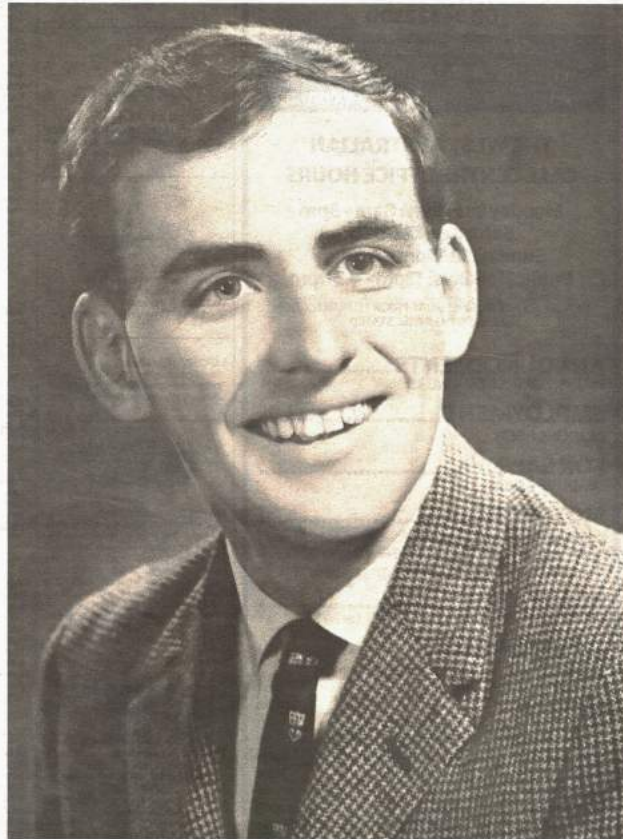
Water was only one of Hopwood's areas of expertise and innovative approach. A formal written summary mentions 40 years of experience in power, oil and gas, minerals processing, research and development, and consulting, as design engineer, project manager, general manager and company director, in various countries.

His contribution to WA's oil and gas industry, particularly on the North West Shelf, struck peers as groundbreaking in the surmounting of technical challenges. For example, he worked with Woodside and other major energy companies on two-phase flow, which entails oil and gas being pumped simultaneously in an undersea pipeline and being separated when emerging on land.

WA's gain had been NSW's loss when Peter's father was transferred from Sydney, Peter's birthplace, to Perth as assistant manager with the Bank of NSW, later Westpac.

Peter Francis Hopwood was born on October 22, 1946, to Phyllis and Frank Hopwood. The interstate switch in 1962 saw him enrol at Christ Church Grammar School in Claremont. The headmaster's recommendation described him as "probably the ablest boy who sat for the Leaving Certificate last year".

Awarded a scholarship by British Petroleum, Hopwood



completed an undergraduate degree and a PhD (postgraduate doctorate), both in mechanical engineering, at UWA. After his family returned to Sydney, he stayed in WA at St George's.

In 1968, as the college's senior student, he wrote for St George's magazine, *The Dragon*. Addressing the "Gentlemen", he welcomed the fact that "entertaining of female guests now takes place legally on Friday nights". Residency became mixed in 1981.

In 1969 he married Diane Rutter. The marriage, which produced two sons, ended in 1981.

Dr Hopwood's professional career began at the UK Atomic Energy Agency, where from 1971-73 he was a research fellow.

Work on desalination was to prove invaluable after his eventual return to Australia.

The family's next stop was the US, where a New York firm, Gibbs and Hill, gave him a range of responsibilities including architect/engineer for a new power station.

Returning to Australia in 1976, he joined Woodside Offshore Petroleum. Subsequent work included senior posts in South Australia and, while based in Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, he managed offshore operations for seven Asian countries.

In 1993 he formed HBH Consultants to provide engineering and project management services in the resources, oil and gas sectors of industry. Environmental considerations led to him becoming non-executive chairman of the International Centre for Application of Solar Energy. Dr Hopwood chaired a

board of eight directors, reporting to WA's minister for energy.

His experience was widely appreciated on becoming a fellow of Engineers Australia and, in 2000, WA president. The general manager of Engineers Australia WA, Susan Kreemer Pickford, says that as chair of Engineering Heritage in 2019 he emphasised the teamwork indispensable to major engineering projects. Engineers Australia acknowledged the global significance of the North West Shelf project with the rare honour of the award of an Engineering Heritage International Marker.

However busy, Dr Hopwood made time for St George's. He was on the board for two periods in the past 30 years, and was chairman from 2013-20. He was a board member of, and donor to, the St George's Foundation.

Diagnosis of a serious ailment, which affected his daily life, was a setback, but his spirits were always bolstered by the care of his partner, Merelyn Williams, with whom he lived since 1982.

Dr Hopwood died on November 1, survived by Merelyn, his sons, Paul and Mark; and Peter's sister, Jenny.

The Warden of St George's, Ian Hardy, is enormously grateful for Dr Hopwood's "enduring contributions to our college's wellbeing and fabric. His is an inspiring example of kindness, friendship and dedication. His enlightened outlook valued precise scholarship, appreciation of music and the arts, and the exchange of ideas in good spirit — and with enlivening wines."

Patrick Cornish